

# **I wasn't lookin' but somehow you found me**

Written by dreamkatcha. Any related videos, as always, can be found on my YouTube channel.

None of this would have been possible without the fantastic resources generously provided by immensely talented emulator authors, and communities such as Hall of Light, Lemon Amiga, Lemon 64, World of Spectrum, Moby Games, World of Longplays and Recorded Amiga Games. Thank you for your tireless dedication to preserving the history of gaming.

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Cross the aquatic scenes from the James Bond movies, Thunderball and The Spy Who Loved Me, and Data East's Sly Spy 1989 coin-op with the platforming elements of Namco's 1986 arcade game, Rolling Thunder, a world domination plot reminiscent of The Spy Who Loved Me and soundtrack and sharks from Jaws, and the warped result looks a lot like Domark's ThunderJaws.

Jaws, it should be noted, is also the name of the assassin henchman who co-stars in The Spy Who Loved Me and Moonraker as portrayed by Richard Kiel. In fact, there's a cavalcade of pop culture allusory crossovers at play waiting enticingly for us to unravel and feel jolly smug about spotting.



Based on Atari's lesser-known arcade cabinet conversion kit released in 1990, the Amiga port was brought to us courtesy of Domark's in-house development team, The Kremlin, who also produced The Spy Who Loved Me movie license tie-in game as it happens.

ThunderJaws was simultaneously released for the Atari ST, Amstrad, and Commodore 64, yet the proposed Spectrum port was never completed. According to World of Spectrum, it remains 'missing in action'.



In charge of programming on the Amiga side of the equation was Neil Harding, while Lloyd Baker and Saurav Sarkar split the graphical duties between themselves and Jolyon Vincent Myers (JVM Design/The Judge) composed the pastiche score, complete with sea mark/navigation buoy gongs that toll over the Jaws title theme.



The Sly Spy Who Was Lynched by Jaw's Little Cousins (or whatever we're calling it) comprises 8 levels alternating between indoor platforming stages and underwater diving missions, and is popularly assumed to be an unofficial sequel to Rolling Thunder. There's plenty of strong evidence to support this notion; the inclusion of the carbon-copied internal backdrops, enemy's propensity to join the melee via sliding doors, and the protagonist's ability to power-jump to the upper platforms, for example (hold down the fire button and push up to accomplish this on the Amiga). Far from dubious hearsay, Atari licensed the game from Namco for distribution outside of Japan so it makes sense that they'd take the next logical step to maximise the return on their investment.





Stringing together this hodgepodge of random gaming and movie constituents is a plot that would feel right at home in a '50s sci-fi comic. Madame Q (another Bond reference clearly), the radiantly beautiful, yet lamentably insane super-villain has kidnapped an incalculable number of bikini-clad babes whilst out cavorting in the sea to serve as human guinea pigs in her lab of iniquity.

Her dastardly despicable plan is to mutate them into a lizard slave army, unleashing them upon the world to empower her dominion over all that it stands for.

It's not entirely clear why we are the one best aligned to put the kibosh on her depraved scheme, though apparently that's what we've been conscripted to do so we may as well get on with it. Bring a buddy along for the ride if you like, this is a two-player game.



Breach Madame Q's control centre on Paradise Isle, destroy her mutant army, and locate the underwater city where she's holed up is all the brief we need to get the Rollerball erm... rolling. Should you be in any doubt as to whether it's worth the trouble you only have to check out the coin-op's title screen, which helpfully informs us that Thunderjaws is "A really excellent game". An optimistic self-assessing sentiment Codemasters would wholeheartedly approve of.



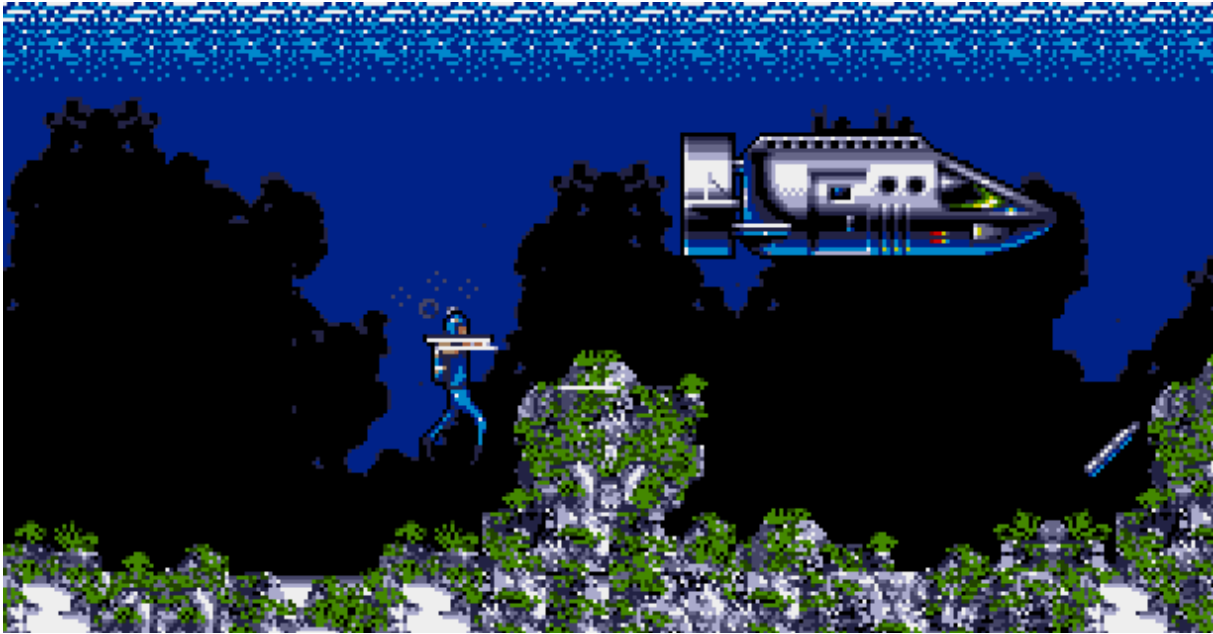
To remind us why we're here Madame Q appears as a permanent fixture in the overbearing HUD at the bottom of the screen looking extraordinarily like Medusa from Starbyte



Software's 1989 RPG/trading game, Rings of Medusa. Perhaps what The Kremlin didn't know when they recycled the image is that Starbyte originally filched it from a painting by erotic fantasy artist Boris Vallejo.

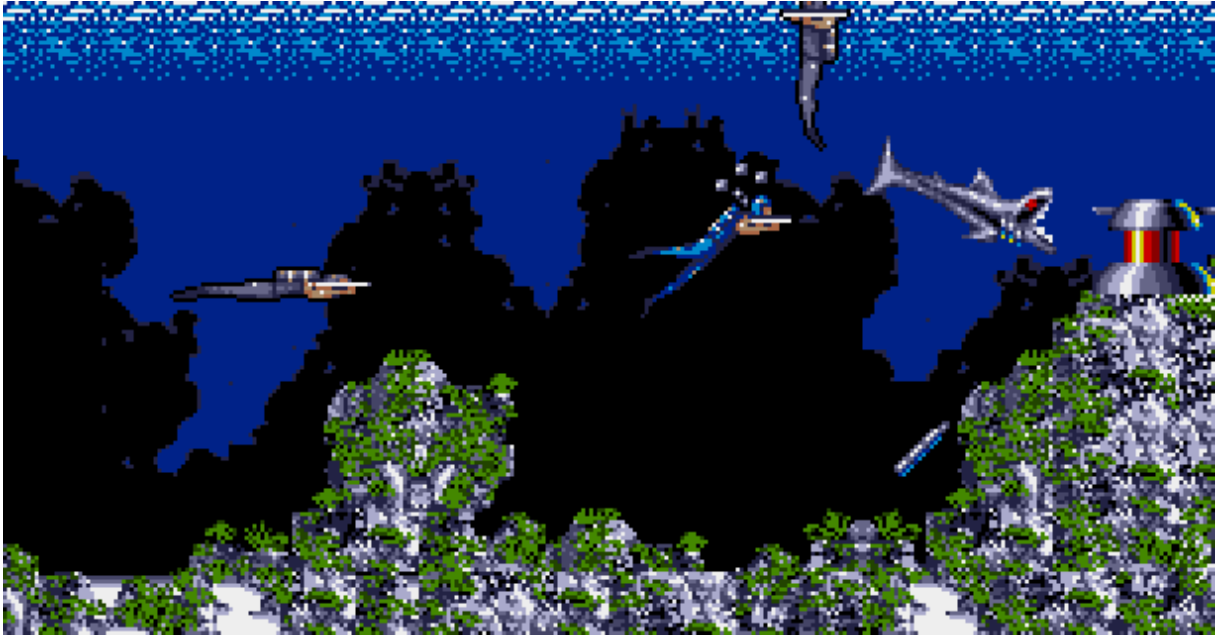


We kick-start proceedings having been deposited underwater by a submarine. Our goal is to reach the hatch to the control centre and the safety (irony alert) of dry land, clearing the sea of CyberSharks, MantaGuys and Grunt Divers as we go.



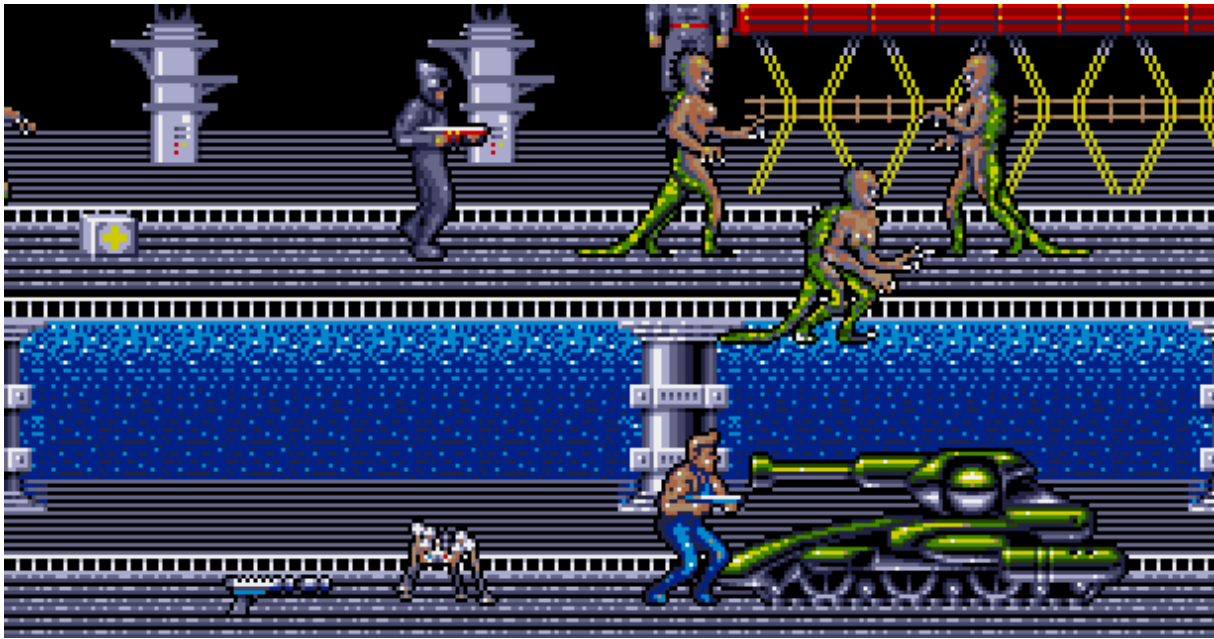
To begin with we're armed with an entirely relevant, fit for purpose harpoon, though can also collect alternative, more potent weapons including a flamethrower, which bizarrely works perfectly well underwater. It must be one of those physics-defying waterproof ones that are all the rage in cartoons.

Oxygen bottles and first aid kits can be found littering the seabed and utilised to replenish your energy. That said, the action crawls by at such a languid pace you'll rarely struggle to reach the end of a level without becoming fish food, even if swimming vertically leaves you exposed and vulnerable to shark bites. Unfortunately, this sets the tone throughout, making the ridiculously long load times and inability to recognise a second disk drive seem entirely fitting.



"It's not even neatly coded: there are graphic glitches, unfriendly collision detection, sprite bugs (enemies hover in mid-air) and levels which just stop, rather than ending properly."

**38% - Commodore Format (November 1991)**



Shoot the shutter at the end of the first sea level about a squillion times and it finally yields, granting you access to the initial platforming section where the aim is to rescue the captive, formerly bathing beauties who are being held hostage in water tanks. If you take a break from being mauled by Bionic Wolves for a moment and focus on what's going on in the background you'll notice that they're in the process of morphing into mutant lizard ladies. Seeing as there's no zombification antidote, the upshot is we'll have to put down many of the damsels in distress we're here to protect.

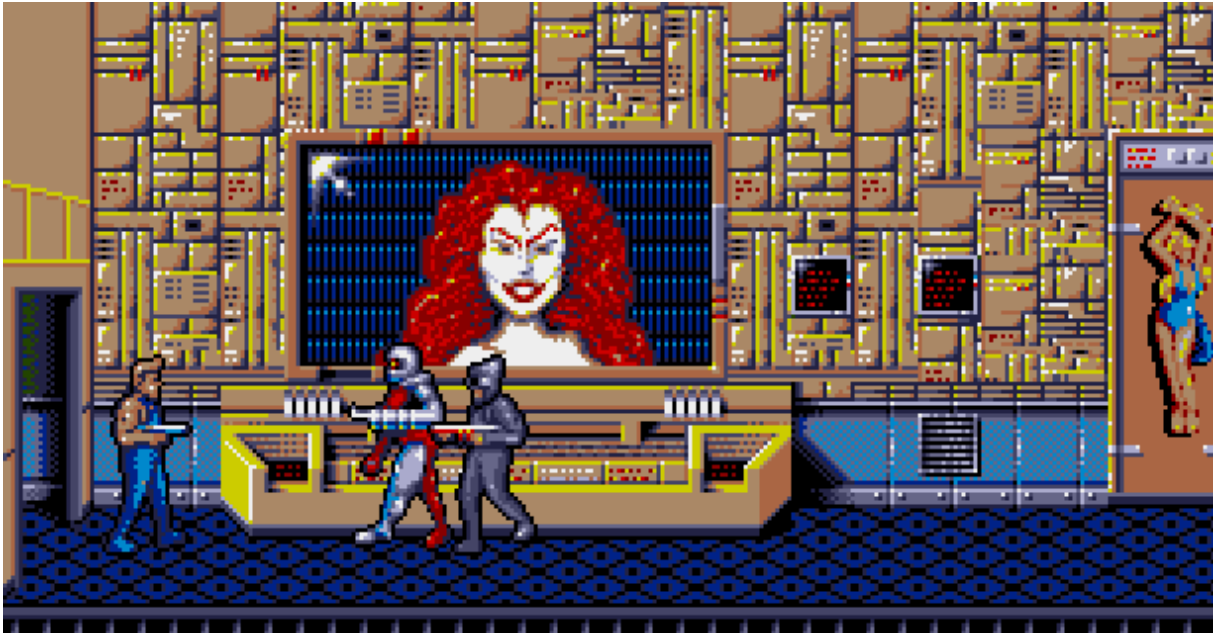


"It's nice-looking and a bit different. Unfortunately, there's just not enough of a long-term challenge to see it through."

"Pretty disappointing. ThunderJaws has its moments, but mostly it's just too slow and repetitive."

### **63% - Amstrad Action (November 1991)**

A running theme is being surveilled by Madame Q as you edge closer to her lair. I've been expecting you, Mr Bond! Parodying Big Brother she looms over you from a giant monitor screen, taunting your noble efforts to vanquish her. By the magic of muffled digitised speech, you're cackled at menacingly and branded a "blathering fool" whose "feeble attempts amuse me".



In the arcade version the speech extends to the exclamations, "how rude", "heavy" or "most heinous" whenever you're attacked as if channelling Bill and Ted in one of their excellent/bogus adventures, leaving you wondering if there's any aspect of the game that *hasn't* been borrowed from an existing IP.

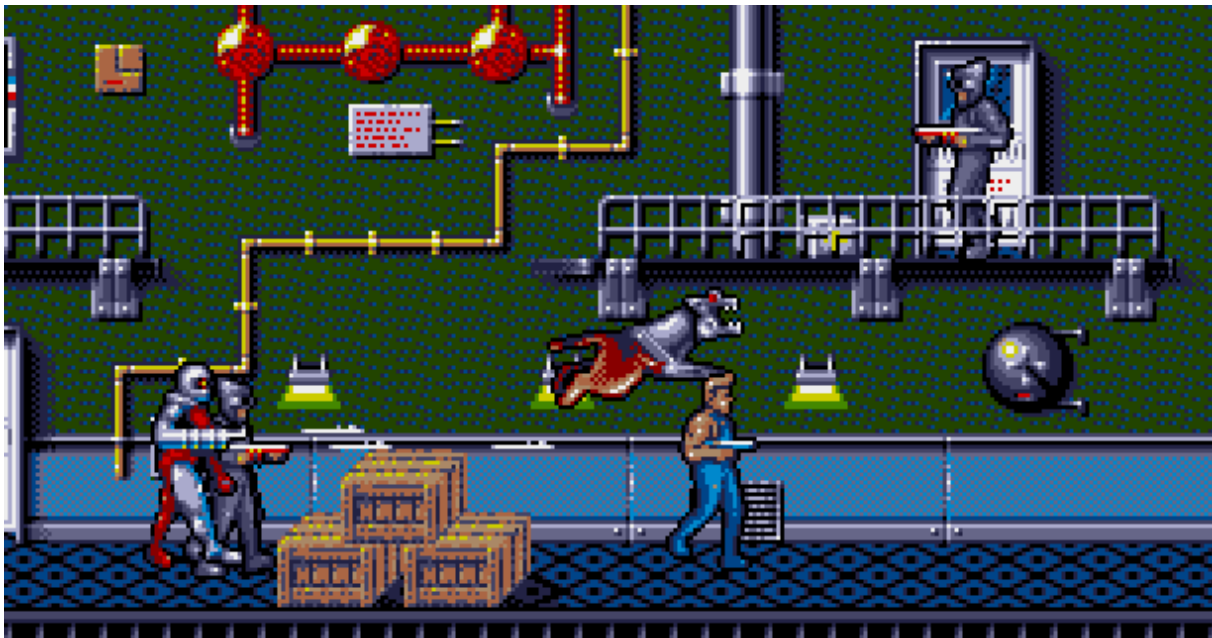
Thanks to the low frame rate of the animation you shuffle around your surroundings in a kind of forwards Moonwalk manoeuvre that sees you gliding over the platforms as if gravity has yet to be invented. While it's hard to imagine this was intentional, the stilted, awkward aesthetic *does* imbue it with a distinctive B movie sci-fi ambience.

"The idea is a little barnacle-encrusted, but it might have worked if the game ran faster. Instead, it jerks along at a rate comparable to continental drift. The sprites are fairly large, but this doesn't excuse the poor update rate. It's painfully slow and rather easy - the first time you play a game, you wouldn't expect to get to Level Three. But you get that far here - with Thunderjaws, you can buy it at 10am and have finished it at lunch. There are a few good



spot effects - the explosions are pretty and there's a lot of blood clouding the water in the sub-aqua levels. But this just isn't enough. If only, if only it was faster and less jerky..."

### **54% - ST Format (March 1992)**



Tougher than the actual enemies - which are relentless yet frail - is overcoming the terrible collision detection and graphical glitches. At least where the former are concerned you can do something about them. In dispatching the Bionic Guards, Grunt Guards, Punkers, Bionic Wolves and Spider 'Bots you have the opportunity to upgrade your firepower to an Uzi 9mm, Explosive Bolt, Tri-Shot, or Super-Seeker, though oddly enough you still cling to your harpoons as though underwater. If you keep moving you can fire these and then chase after them, scrolling the playfield to bring new baddies into the fray, skewering them before they know what hit them.

The first boss you encounter is a sort disembodied ED-209 head, levitating before you sans any puppet strings. It's

unlikely to be the toughest challenge you'll ever face, well, unless you earn your living as a reality TV star.

Rescue the captives from their water torture chambers and you're rewarded with a barrage of appreciative smooches from the Miss World wannabes, accompanied by a tacky burlesque ditty.



"If you are the sort of player who enjoys being able to go into autopilot and shooting and jumping through eight tedious levels just for the trigger-finger exercise, then you'll love this. People who aren't that bored yet will want to find something else to do."

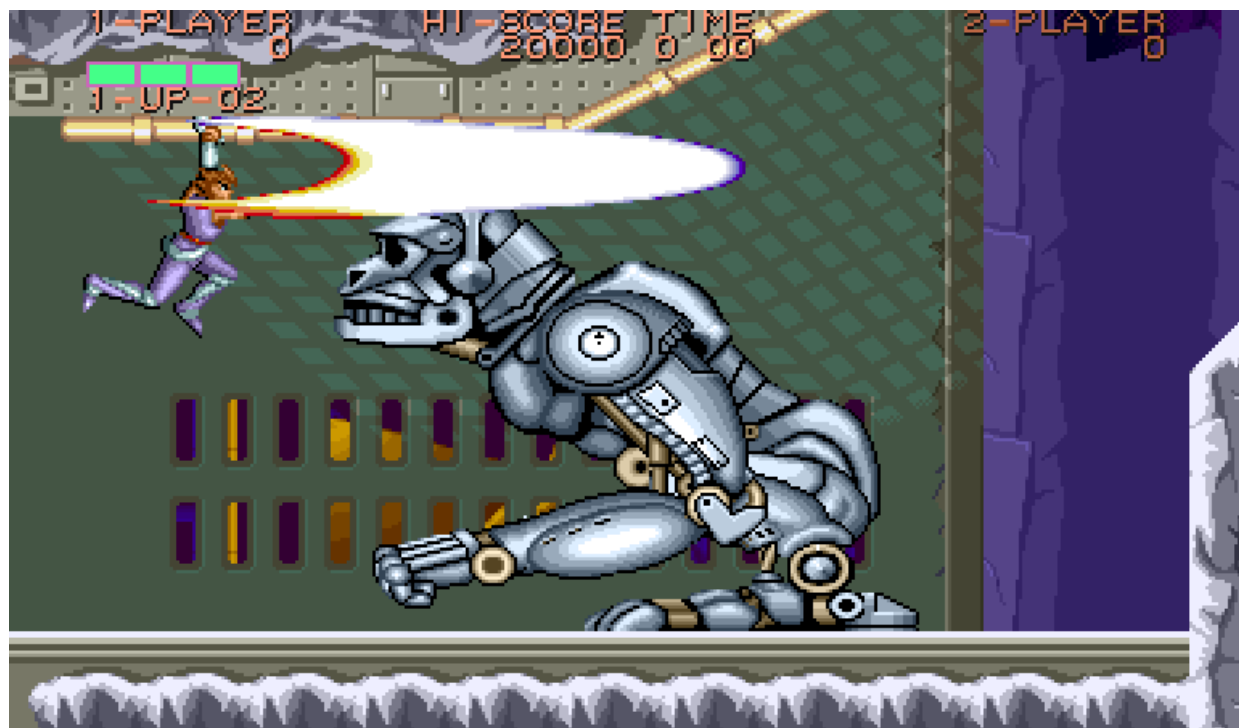
**68% - The One (August 1991)**







Back in the water beyond a submerged wrecking yard you take on a monolithic armed robo-shark submarine boss, before returning to terra firma beneath an active volcano. Here Bat Babes, Lava Lords, Flaming Dancers and Punkers tooled up with Edward's scissor-hands stalk your every move, culminating in a grapple with King Kong who emerges from the rocks to block your exit. If he looks familiar it might be because it's triggering flashbacks to all those arcade sessions you spent wrestling with a Strider coin-op cabinet.



Finally, you come face to face with Madame Q who manifests as a floating, worty splodge of a witch's head with a punk hairdo and lashing reptile tongue. Only moments before pegging it does she transform back into her deceptively seductive human form.



For your trouble, you're presented with a congratulations message featuring a gratuitous picture of Madame Q, and in the arcade version, continuing the Bill and Ted vibe a "your gameplay was most bodacious" message. Duly acknowledged it's high score table time where we're invited to join the ranks of the "most excellent divers" and pay our respects to "some of the most righteous dudes and babes who brought you ThunderJaws."



MOST <i>EXCELLENT</i> DIVERS	
<p>Congratulations!</p> <p>Enter Your Score</p> <p>Player 1</p> <p>NPI</p>	

A roll call of the sprite cast follows and we're out. Madame Q is no more, the world's safe (for *now*, obviously) and there's another Bond movie just starting on the telly for the 97th time this month (Rest in Peace Sir Roger Moore). I suppose it's back to work on Monday at the Sealife Centre, polishing shark tanks and brushing the sea slugs.

That might actually be more exhilarating than playing ThunderJaws. It hasn't exactly been the rollercoaster ride of thrills and spills teased by the opening hyperbole. Trudgingly-paced, the game swiftly becomes repetitive and the button-mashing monotonous. It's not an *awful* conversion - the arcade game itself wasn't fantastic and tellingly was never released as a standalone cabinet - just bland and derivative.

Ocean, who had a license to publish Domark's older titles under their budget Hit Squad label, chose to pass over ThunderJaws. I'd imagine they had access to the sales figures and weren't convinced it would be a financial success, even as a cheap and cheerful re-release. That and the fact no sequels were proposed says it all.

Ah, no wait...

"The game scrambles hairbright past the POWER CUCUMBER." - **Power Play review (November 1991)**

Now that says it all.

